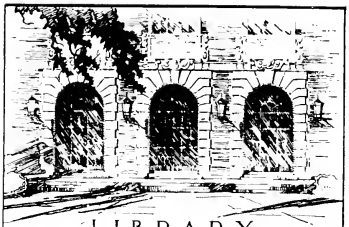

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REPLY

TO THE

DEFENCE OF THE OPIUM TRADE

BY THE

SHANGHAI CORRESPONDENT OF THE "TIMES."

BY

F. STORRS TURNER,

Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade.

London:

DYER BROTHERS,

AMEN CORNER, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1881.

EXPLANATORY.

THE *Times*, March 31st, published a letter from Shanghai, the avowed object of which was to refute the arguments of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade. Several persons have intimated to the Secretary their opinion that he ought to reply to the attack. It does not appear to have occurred to their minds that a reply might have been sent to the *Times*, and denied insertion. Such, however, was the case. Possibly the Editor considered a reply unnecessary ; the same issue of the *Times* which contained the Shanghai letter having also contained a leading article, characterizing it thus: "It is a plea of extenuating circumstances rather than of not guilty;" a plea which "might have been advanced in the days of Queen Anne, on behalf of the stipulation by which England acquired the privilege of providing the Spanish West Indies with negro slaves." Having avowed himself unconvinced by his Correspondent's logic, the Editor may have deemed it superfluous to print any other reply. But, unfortunately, some provincial newspapers reproduced the Shanghai letter, and not the leading article. It seems, therefore, to be necessary that the Shanghai writer's attack should be answered by a representative of the Society.

Letter from the Marquis Tseng, the Chinese Minister in London.

THE *Friend of China* for February containing a review of the correspondence between Sir Thomas Wade and his Imperial Highness the Prince of Kung respecting the Chefoo Convention, the Secretary sent a copy of the magazine to his Excellency the Marquis Tsêng, then in St. Petersburg, and ventured to draw his attention to the concluding paragraph, in which regret is expressed by the editor of the magazine that "throughout this correspondence the Prince of Kung does not complain of the forcing of a deleterious drug into China, but discusses the subject in its fiscal aspect only." Our Secretary was favoured by the following reply :—

"CHINESE LEGATION, ST. PETERSBURG,
"18*th February*, 1881.

"SIR,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 31st ultimo, in which, after calling my attention to an article contained in the *Friend of China*, you express regret that, in the correspondence to which it refers, his Imperial Highness the Prince of Kung should have discussed the opium clause of the Chefoo Convention in its fiscal, rather than in its moral relations. You then go on to point out the probability of the 'defenders' of the opium trade adducing this in support of the view that the Chinese Government is indifferent to the lamentable consequences which it entails on the people, and regards the matter only in so far as it concerns the revenue of the country.

"I should indeed be pained, could I bring myself to believe that the defenders of the opium trade, supposing them to exist, could, in the face of so many facts to the contrary, presume to found on the prince's despatches a conclusion so unjust and unwarrantable.

"Surely the action of the Chinese Government and the opinions of the Prince of Kung, on the subject of opium, are well known, and have been too unequivocally expressed to admit of their sincerity in reprobating the opium trade being for a moment put in question. The sale and the consumption of the drug have been forbidden and condemned by the throne under several successive sovereigns. During many years the Government steadily and firmly resisted the importation, and at last, rather than appear to sanction the use of opium by authorizing its introduction, accepted the alternative of war. Can any country give a stronger proof of the sincerity of its professions than by its consenting to maintain them by the *ultima ratio regum*?

"These things being so well known, will, I am sure, prevent the possibility of any one drawing the conclusion which you seem to fear. Moreover, a little consideration will suffice to show that, under the circumstances, the Prince of Kung placed the question alluded to on the only ground which was open to him. As a statesman he had to deal with a treaty which recognized the question of opium in its fiscal aspect alone. It was, therefore, incumbent on him to confine himself to that view of the case; but even had it been otherwise, it is questionable whether the laudable object which your Society was founded to effect would have been much furthered by mixing up questions of diplomacy with morality. Governments are not proverbial for the success with which they have dealt with questions respecting morals. Too often it has been their fate to have to abandon them to private enterprise, the influence of the spread of education, and the silent operation of social causes which as yet are but imperfectly understood. Amongst the evils for whose reformation we must look to these agencies, I am afraid, we must place those of spirit-drinking and opium-smoking.

"Too often, also, at the risk of appearing to sanction what they in reality condemned, Governments have been reluctantly compelled to legislate for conditions which they would rather have chosen to abolish or ignore. The fate of the Chinese Government has been no exception to this rule, and the number of instances in which English statesmen have been forced to do it in their own country, will prevent them from misinterpreting the motives of other Governments who have had to do the same.

"These considerations being borne in mind, will, I trust, prevent any one from falling into the mistake of considering that the Chinese Government has ceased to view the consumption of opium by its subjects otherwise than as one of the most grievous evils which ever befell a nation.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,
"Your most obedient, humble Servant,
"TSÊNG."

To the SECRETARY, *Anglo-Oriental Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, London.*

REPLY TO THE SHANGHAI CORRESPONDENT OF THE "TIMES."

ALARMED at the progress of the Anti-Opium agitation, the Shanghai Correspondent of the *Times* has written a long letter exclusively devoted to its confutation. The sum and substance of the letter is contained in the statement that much opium is produced in China, and in two deductions from it, that therefore it is "unfair and untrue" to accuse England of forcing opium on China, and that "the question of the supply by India to China of opium hardly comes within the domain of practical politics." The *non sequitur* is transparent. Granted that the Chinese also produce the drug. Let us suppose, as seems not improbable, that out of every thousand victims of the poison the Indian drug only kills half. Are we justified in destroying the five hundred, because the Chinese themselves poison the other five hundred? This logic is equivalent to saying that because there is an immense amount of gambling always going on in England, on the turf and elsewhere, *therefore* there can be no moral objection to the opening of State lotteries, and licensed *rouge et noir* saloons in London; and, moreover, if Russia were strong enough, she might insist upon opening gambling-hells in our streets to supply herself with a revenue! It is not surprising that such an argument is too bad even for the *Times*, as appears by the Editor disavowing it in the very paper which contains the letter.

Before exposing the Shanghai writer's omission of essential facts in relation to the poppy in China, a few words about the "violence" of our agitation. Our adversary recounts the indictment brought against the British nation, in language intended to convey the impression of extravagance. But in his caricature the main items of the grave indictment are recognizable, and he does not attempt to dispute them, as indeed he could not. Two points only call for remark. He says, "the British public is told that England taught China to smoke opium," and that the Chinese Government has been "ever vigilant to minimize the evil." The Society for the Suppression of

the Opium Trade cannot answer for every speech made on every platform in the United Kingdom; but we know nothing of these mis-statements. The organ of the Society has repeatedly pointed out and lamented the laxity of the Chinese Government in enforcing its laws against opium. To say that England taught China to smoke opium is absurd, for Englishmen do not smoke it, nor do they know how to do it. The practice is peculiar, and requires a special apparatus.

There is, however, a sense in which this country *is* guilty of introducing and propagating in some parts of China a vice unknown amongst ourselves. In a country village, ten miles from the nearest public-house, drunkenness is not absolutely unknown. There are two or three old topers there who regularly get drunk on market-days, and even bring supplies of liquor home with them. The landlord opens a public-house in the village; and in a few years' time there are scores of tipplers found at its bar, who never got drunk before. Might it not truthfully be said that that landlord *taught* those villagers to drink? In Burma opium-eating was not absolutely unknown, but the mass of the population were untouched by the vice. England conquers the country, imports opium from Calcutta, licenses shops for its sale, the agents of which gratuitously distribute cakes of opium, until the young men have got a liking for the drug. In the Government Report on the Excise Department in British Burma for the year 1879-80, the officer for Prome District states :—

"To novices, or to those altogether ignorant of the taste of opium, a preparation called *Koon-bone*, is sold or given away. Koon-bone is sliced betel leaf, steeped in a decoction of opium, and is chewed. It is made up in small packets which are sold at a pice or two a packet, or more frequently perhaps given away gratis, especially if the victim be a lad twelve or fourteen years old. Pure opium would, probably, at first inspire disgust in one so young. His tastes are therefore consulted, and he is invited to take the drug in a milder form. Thus he is allured to evil courses which soon develope into evil habits, the sequel of which is disgrace and ruin."

Is not that *teaching* the Burmese the vice? So in China, although, possibly, there may have been opium-smoking before, and independent of, the Indian trade, the vice mightily increased, gathered new victims, penetrated into new districts, in consequence of that trade. In one sense, and in some degree, the sad and shameful charge, that we *taught* the Chinese the abuse of the drug, is but too true.

Mr. Watters, Consul at Ichang, is said to have discovered that the vice has existed in China "for several hundred years, long

before foreign merchants or their opium were ever dreamt of." Ichang, in Western Hu-Pei, has become a Consular station since the Chefoo Convention, and the same agreement has introduced a Consular Agent into the province of Szechuen. These places are in Western China, a region hitherto almost unknown to our merchants and missionaries. Supposing that Mr. Watters' discovery be true, it is needful to remember that China is a vast country, to be compared in size to Europe, its provinces being equal to European kingdoms—Szechuen being nearly three times as large as England and Wales. Moreover, owing to the immense distances and the slow methods of locomotion, a journey across China is a matter of months. It would take as long or longer to go from Canton to the capital of Szechuen, as from London to Melbourne ; and the intercourse between these distant provinces is comparatively slight. If, therefore, the Chinese in the far west smoked opium several hundred years ago, it is as much a discovery to-day to the Chinese of the sea-board as it is to Mr. Watters and ourselves. All the eastern provinces of China know that the drug came to them from India ; and that the baneful habit was propagated amongst them by the diffusion of the "foreign dirt," or "foreign medicine." Mr. Watters' story affects the question of our criminality, much as if we had debauched North America with opium, and some one should say we are not blameworthy because it has been discovered that in South America opium has been used for centuries. Last year Mr. Frank Trench, of the China Inland Mission, travelling in Yunnan—undoubtedly the original seat of the poppy in China—found the plant everywhere, and the people altogether given over to the drug. What did they tell him ? One spoke of opium, and said, "Did it not come from Yang-kwoh (foreign countries) ?" "It was a terrible curse," he said. And, again, at another village :—

"Here I asked two or three old men how long had opium been commonly smoked here ? They said for almost thirty years, but not for thirty years. 'Before that time had you opium here ?' I asked. 'No.' 'Where did it then come from ?' Each said, from 'Yang-kwoh,' i.e. foreign countries. That is, thirty years ago the poppy was a plant unknown in this province; and I have been told the same in respect of the province of Kwei Chau."

Mr. Watters might mock at the ignorance of these villagers, and produce some old book showing that the poppy was cultivated in Yunnan 300 years ago. So it was *in one part of Yunnan, and for medical purposes*, as we know from the great

botanical work, the *Pin Ts'o*. But Yunnan is considerably larger than England, and these old men, ignorant of what happened elsewhere as a Somersetshire farm-labourer is ignorant of things in Yorkshire, were, no doubt, correct in speaking of their own part of the country. In a word, it is uncertain that opium smoking was known at all in China before the middle of last century; it is absolutely certain that the vice has only been generally known throughout China within two or three generations at most; and that this lamentable diffusion has taken place in connexion with our Indian trade.

We are told, among these new discoveries, that in Western China the habit is regarded "not as a curse, but as a *sine quâ non* for a Chinaman." This is very strange, and in flat contradiction to the opinion of the Yunnan elders, as stated to Mr. Trench. Certainly it is quite otherwise in Eastern China, where Bengal opium is smoked, the habit being regarded, as the Marquis Tsêng, the present Chinese Minister in London, describes it in his letter of February 18, 1881, as "one of the most grievous evils which ever befell a nation." This is the universal opinion of all Chinese with whom Europeans have hitherto come in contact, of Sir Thomas Wade, Sir Rutherford Alcock, and a host of medical men and missionaries. That the native opium of Western China is somewhat less injurious than the more potent product of Malwa and Benares, we knew from Consul Hughes, of Hankow, who reported in 1874 (Commercial Reports, China, 1874, page 4) :—

"Native opium seems, in fact, to be in rather more favour in this part of China than formerly. It is known to be generally used by the inhabitants of the localities where it is grown and elsewhere by those who cannot afford to buy the foreign drug. But it is also stated that many well-to-do Chinese, who had been in the habit of smoking foreign opium, have given it up in whole or in part in favour of the native article, the use of which is believed to be less hurtful to the constitution, and attended with less physical inconvenience. For instance, the confirmed smoker of Indian opium generally passes sleepless nights, whereas smokers of native opium do not suffer to the same extent in this respect. The Szechuen product contains much less pure opium than is contained in Malwa, the 'touch' of the former being, according to the report of an expert, 44, of the latter 75. It is not, therefore, surprising that, as remarked by travellers, boatmen and other labourers in Szechuen should be able to smoke native opium without being unfitted for work."

Sir Rutherford Alcock also reported to the Government of India, in 1869 :—"It appears that the native drug is not only far less costly than the Indian, but greatly preferred by the Chinese, as less potent in its effects, and consequently in all probability

much less injurious" (Calcutta Blue Book, page 235). In 1877, Consul Sinclair reported from Foochow:—"Native drug has less potency and is less deleterious than Indian" (Commercial Reports, China, 1877, page 56).

If, then, Chinese grown opium is not so destructive as Indian, this, instead of being an argument for tolerating the Indian trade, is an additional condemnation. Our drug is, we know, pernicious in its effects; let us cease to force it into China, and leave them to supply themselves if they will with their own less injurious article.

In regard to the amount of opium produced in China, nothing accurate is known. Every scrap of information about this, to be gathered from Consular and Customs Reports, has been carefully published, year by year, in the *Friend of China*. In the Calcutta Blue Book (page 218), Mr. N. Nusserwanjee, in 1869, writes to the Board of Revenue, as the result of his inquiries, that "not less than 40,000 piculs were produced last year" in China. Turn over the page, and we read Mr. Keswick's (of Jardine, Matheson, and Co.) estimate, received from a Chinese source, for the same year, that the production was "about 5000 piculs." In 1877, Sir B. Robertson, Consul at Canton, estimated the outturn (China, No. 5, 1877, page 4), "on Chinese authority," as from 25,000 to 32,000 piculs (133$\frac{1}{3}$ lbs. per picul). In the same year, Mr. Hippisley, a Chinese Customs Officer, put down the product in Kweichow alone as 15,000 piculs in 1868, and tells us that Baron von Richthofen set down that of Szechuen, in 1872, "as at least 60,000 piculs, perhaps 100,000." This last estimate is similar to that given by the Shanghai letter, but it is purely conjectural. In 1878, Consul Gardner, an apologist for the opium trade, says, "The average amount of foreign opium consumed in China is about 12,000,000 lbs. per annum; probably 5,000,000 lbs. more of native opium is produced" (Commercial Reports, China, 1878, page 55). It suits the advocate of the Indian opium trade to flaunt the higher figures in our faces as though they were ascertained facts; but the truth is, they are mere guesses, no more trustworthy than the lower. To talk of statistics in this connexion is deceptive. The cultivation of the poppy is illegal in China. There is no Imperial impost on the native drug. Local mandarins take bribes to connive at the infringement of the law; and, since the Treaty of Tientsin, in some districts this may have been done with such regularity as to give to the collection of this black-mail the semblance of regular taxation. Again, as foreign opium passes the inland customs stations on

payment of *li-kin*, so, since 1868, the native drug has formed a common article of commerce in Hankow and elsewhere, and "provisional regulations," emanating from provincial authorities, have permitted its transit (see the Chinese Customs Report, quoted in *Friend of China*, vol. iii. page 157), and thus the drug comes within the cognizance of the Customs. But this can give no sufficient basis for calculation of the amount of native opium produced. We know that it is large, and that of recent years it has been increasing frightfully, but the quantity produced can only be vaguely conjectured.

We have now to point out a most important fact, altogether lost sight of by the Shanghai correspondent. *The recent rapid progress of the poppy in China is the sequence of our opium trade and the Opium War.* Briefly the case stands thus: before the Opium War the importation of the drug and the cultivation of the poppy were alike illegal in China. The Government resisted both; but the British opium smugglers were too strong for them, and, although little is known of the interior in those days, it is probable they had but indifferent success in their opposition to the native poppy in the distant west. But the broad fact is certain, that after the Opium War, the poppy spread into new districts, and still more after the Treaty of Tientsin legalized the foreign trade. The Calcutta Blue Book contains many proofs of this. In 1848, Gulzlaff reported to the Indian Government (page 202) :—

"It is impossible to ascertain the whole amount of opium thus produced in China, or to point out *the progressive increase since the Nanking Treaty*. The Government having relaxed in the execution of its prohibition against the drug, there is not the least doubt of the plant being now more extensively grown than ever before."

Consul Robertson writes of Kwangtung Province (page 223):—

"As regards the cultivation, poppy seed was first brought into the Sin-hwei District in 1861."

Mr. Mayers quotes an Edict in the *Peking Gazette* of January 22, 1869, which says (page 222):—

"Of late the growth has by degrees extended into the provinces of Kiang-su, Ho-nan, Shan-tung, &c."

Passing over other instances, quotation of which is not necessary, the fact being notorious in China, we will only call attention to the following extract from the Report of the Delegates of the Chamber of Commerce of Shanghai on the trade of the Upper Yangtse, 1869 (page 260):—

"From the natives we learn that ten years ago all the opium that was grown in Szechuen was in small patches in gardens, ostensibly for amusement, the penalty for growing it being death."

A Memorandum of the Financial Department of the Indian Government, dated 23rd February, 1871, sums up the results of wide inquiry in terms which fully support our view; particularly stating (1) that up to 1817, native opium was produced only in Yunnan; (2) that between 1817 and 1840, the cultivation was introduced into Szechuen, Kwangsi, and Kwei-chow; (3) that up to 1848 the Imperial Government strenuously opposed the cultivation; (4) that after 1848 a great increase of the poppy took place; so that in fifteen years, from 1848 to 1864, the whole of Western China became an opium-producing region. The Opium War ended in 1842. The progress of the poppy in the eastern provinces, since the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858, is equally marked.

What produced this rapid increase of the cultivation? We are not left to conjecture about this. Our Consular reports again and again speak of the policy of China as verging towards the legalization of the growth. Some Viceroys were reported positively to encourage it, with the avowed object of ousting the more injurious foreign drug. In the Prince of Kung's great despatch to Sir R. Alcock, in 1869, this state of things is distinctly pourtrayed (Calcutta Blue Book, page 264):—

"There are others, again, who suggest the removal of the prohibitions against the growth of the poppy. They argue that, as there is no means of stopping the foreign (opium) trade, there can be no harm, as a temporary measure, in withdrawing the prohibition on its growth. We should thus not only deprive the foreign merchant of a main source of his profits, but should increase our revenue to boot. The sovereign rights of China are, indeed, competent to this. Such a course would be practicable; and, indeed, the writers cannot say that, as a last resource, it will not come to this; but they are most unwilling that such prohibition should be removed, holding as they do, that a right system of government should appreciate the beneficence of Heaven, and (seek to) remove any grievance which afflicts its people, while, to allow them to go on to destruction, though an increase of revenue may result, will provoke the judgment of Heaven and the condemnation of men. Neither of the above plans, indeed, is satisfactory. If it be desired to remove the very root, and to stop the evil at its source, nothing will be effective but a prohibition to be enforced alike by both parties."

The hesitancy of the Government is clearly traceable. They felt the hopelessness of combating the native growth while compelled to admit the Indian drug, yet they could not bring their minds to legalize the injurious production. They have not legalized it to this day. On the contrary, within the last five

years fresh Imperial Edicts have again prohibited both the cultivation and consumption of the drug, and the Reports of Her Majesty's Consuls contain many references to the efforts of Provincial Governors to extirpate the poppy and close the opium-smoking houses. These, however, have not been felt throughout the whole Empire, nor steadily maintained anywhere. Admitting and deploring the weakness of Chinese administration, we must not forget that the foreign trade to a large extent paralyzes its efforts against the internal production.* The result has been that enormous increase of the Chinese cultivation which the Shanghai Correspondent brings forward as a reason why England should not be troubled inconscience about the Indian trade. Our iniquitous traffic is the occasion of the development of the Chinese growth, and then the Chinese growth is pleaded as a justification of our iniquitous traffic!

Our reply to the Shanghai letter may be summed up thus :—

1. The fact, artfully paraded as a new discovery, that a great quantity of opium is produced in China, is no discovery at all, but has been taken into account all along.

2. This fact cannot excuse the British opium trade, inasmuch as it is partly a consequence of that trade.

3. The assertions about the antiquity of opium smoking in Western China, and its comparative harmlessness, are mere assertions, easily made, as they have been often made before, but never yet substantiated. If, however, they should prove to be true, they apply only to the distant west of China, and do not affect the eastern half of China, where the more powerful Indian drug is used.

4. The statements that "the Chinese allow the free cultivation of the poppy," and regard native-grown opium as a "legitimate source of revenue," are both contrary to fact. None of the Imperial prohibitions have been repealed, and no "legitimate" revenue is derived from the Chinese poppy. Ever and anon, efforts are made in different places to extirpate the vice and the cultivation together; but it is not to be wondered at that these are not steadily persisted in, while the foreign import continues.

* The following shows one way in which this effect is produced. In a Chinese newspaper, the *Wan Kuo Kung Pao*, of date 20th April, 1878, it is related that the District Magistrate of Siangshan, hearing of a certain farmer who, regardless of his proclamations, had declared that he would not give up cultivating the poppy, went to the spot, and directed the man to pull up the crop and plant grain instead. The former replied, "When the authorities will cease to collect a revenue from Foreign Opium, I will obey your orders and destroy the poppies; but failing this, how can you forbid me to plant them?"

Mr. Allen, Consul at Shanghai, in 1879, says in his last Report : — "I have no hesitation in expressing my opinion that the better class of Chinese officials feel that the trade in opium, and the consumption of it, are two evils which must eventually be put down." The Prince of Kung wrote to Sir R. Alcock :—"Were both nations to vigorously prohibit the growth of the poppy, both the traffic in, and the consumption of opium might alike be put an end to. . . . If his Excellency the British Minister cannot, before it is too late, arrange a plan for the joint prohibition (of the traffic), then no matter with what devotedness the writers may plead, they may be unable to cause the people to put aside ill-feeling, and so strengthen friendly relations as to place them for ever beyond the fear of disturbance." This is a polite way of saying that unless we cease to force our opium into China, sooner or later we shall have to fight another opium war.

The argument of the Shanghai apologist for the opium trade is answered. But there still remains a serious difficulty. In its naked deformity, the plea that as the Chinese will have poison we may as well furnish it to them and get the profits, revolts every honest man. Put, however, in another way, the same argument discourages many good men from active effort against our opium trade. They admit the evil, and deplore it, but think that it is past cure. China is hopelessly addicted to the drug, they say; and if India were to cease to send it, other sources would supply the deficiency. What practical good would result ? Shall we call upon Great Britain for an heroic sacrifice which will lead to no practical good ?

To answer this query we must consider what would be the probable and what the certain consequences if Great Britain were at this time to do its best to extinguish the pernicious trade, which its emissaries in India have so long fostered.

The probable effect would be an immediate check to the opium-vice in China, and its gradual diminution. We can only speak of probabilities here, which different minds will estimate according to their prepossessions. The attitude of the Chinese Government leads to the expectation that it would embrace the opportunity for a vigorous effort to stamp out the poppy in China. In this it would be supported by the moral sense of the nation. Instant and complete success could not be looked for. National vices do not die out instantly before hostile legislation; but certainly the struggle against opium smoking would be much easier and more hopeful were the foreign import removed, or the Chinese permitted to control it at their pleasure. Another probable conse-

quence would be the increase of exports from Great Britain to China, partly as a direct result of the removal of opium, and still more through the increase of good-will granting new facilities for commerce.

Other results are not probable, but certain, and these would amply repay us for the effort and the sacrifice. It is certain that a reversal of the policy pursued by our Government hitherto would remove a great scandal, and exalt Britain in the eyes of all mankind; it is certain that it would conciliate the Chinese nation, and do more than anything else in our power to promote beneficial intercourse between the two nations; it is certain that the contemplated step would remove two serious dangers, the danger to India of a sudden and unexpected collapse of the opium revenue at a time when it would be most inconvenient to meet it, and the danger of a rupture with China, which is always imminent so long as this scandal continues; it is certain that such action on our part would promote the progress of civilization and Christianity, both in India and in China, that is, among half the human race. There is no limit to the far-reaching happy consequences which would certainly ensue if even now, at the eleventh hour, Britain had the moral courage to own her fault, and to cease from the perpetration of a wrong which outrages the conscience of mankind.